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## *KIDS ARE TRYING THIS AT HOME!*

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Hey, kids, let's have some fun!

Let's set up a backyard wrestling ring like other kids are doing all over the country and smash each other's skulls with construction signs and fluorescent lightbulbs! Let's throw each other from rooftops! Let's fling each other down on hundreds of tacks! Let's cream each other with steel chairs, kendo sticks, trash cans, stop signs, guitars, snow shovels, crutches, ladders, cactuses, mattress frames, two-by-fours with nails sticking out and just, you know, stuff from around the house! Yeah, it hurts, but that's what makes it cool, dude!

While we're maiming ourselves, let's tape the whole thing, and--if we live--we can send it to a sick puppy named Rick Mahr, who might include us on his \$19.95 Best of Backyard Wrestling videos and get a sick puppy like Howard Stern to advertise it on his TV show. That way kids just like us will see it and try to do sick-puppy things to each other, too!

And Mahr will be bathing in \$100 bills--"It's the hottest selling videotape in America," he claims--and all we'll have is a snapped neck and a wheelchair. But, hey, that's showbiz, right? XFL players aren't the only ones who are trying to get noticed by Vince McMahon, you know.

Take Luke Hadley, 21, of Sturgeon Bay, Wis. McMahon hasn't discovered him yet--maybe because the WWF refuses to watch homemade wrestling videos it receives--but that's not because Hadley isn't trying. He says he's had 10 concussions, a broken arm, a broken tailbone and five horrific falls, and he's got a hundred scars and a few soft spots in his brain to prove it. "Sometimes I want to say stuff, and no words come out," he says. He doesn't have any insurance, but, "in 20 years, after I hit it big, I'll be able to afford all the surgeries I need." Damn right, Luke.

I mean, it can't be that dangerous or parents would stop it, right? You go to a backyard wrestling show and all you see are kids, no parents. Jose Espinoza of Orange County, Calif., sees his son, 18-year-old Andres, come home looking like a crash-test dummy, but he's not buggin', right? "He comes home limping sometimes, but it seems like he's having fun with it," says Jose. "I'm thinking about going to one of his shows someday."

Former WWF wrestler Mick Foley wishes more parents would wake up. "As soon as you notice the cheese grater is missing and little Jimmy's head is suddenly shaped funny, you might want to start worrying."

The cheese grater is the only thing Andres and his pals haven't used. Sometimes they'll smack one another with a bat wrapped in barbed wire. Or set up a Death Table, which is a piece of plywood stretched between two folding chairs with the plywood wrapped in barbed wire, covered in fluorescent bulbs, littered with tacks, doused with lighter fluid and set on fire. Then somebody is thrown on it! Hey, Vince, how come that's not on the WWF?

"It's so much fun," says Andres's homey, Danny (Stray Cat) Rivera, 16. "I got a piece of a light tube stuck in my head. That one hurted. Had a [broken] bulb stuck in the side of my stomach, too, but we taped it up. Had a thumbtack stuck in my head backward. We took it out with pliers, and it kind of pulled a big thing of skin out, but we SuperGlued the skin shut. You got to have blood for the crowd. That's what gets it pumped up."

Danny says he comes home with big gouges out of his head, but he hides his bloody clothes in his room. The only person who notices is Danny, "'cause they start to stink so bad," he says.

Everybody's going hard-core, baby. In Brewster, Ohio, guys like 20-year-old "Masked" Mike Jackson have a signature trick. For instance, if Mike's opponent is knocked out cold, Mike will take a pack of firecrackers, rest them on the dude's stomach and set them off. Sometimes the dude getting lit is Mike himself. "My mom, she don't care no more," says Mike.

Once Frank (the Masked Fish) Criniti, 21, of Cleveland, was thrown onto a flaming table, caught on fire and had to roll over eight times to put it out. His dad says Frank, who's done the trick twice more, is "an idiot." Frank says, "We're thinking about buying a fire blanket."

Yeah, O.K., it's dangerous. Yeah, not long ago a seven-year-old killed his three-year-old brother with a clothesline maneuver. Yeah, 30-year-old Tony Nash died his first time in a makeshift ring. And, yeah, a 14-year-old boy last week was found guilty of murdering a six-year-old girl, a family friend, in July 1999 using moves he saw on televised wrestling.

But, dude, didn't you hear me? We could make the video!

COLOR PHOTO: DANA FINEMAN/SYGMA

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